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How the World Turns Quietly

by

Dana Boyer

A THESIS

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HOW THE WORLD TURNS QUIETLY

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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This thesis is composed of original poems written while studying both writing and literature at the University of Nebraska. The introduction partially discusses the role that women have played in writing in the past century. It discusses the poetry of Elizabeth Spire, and the prose of Virginia Woolf and Tillie Olsen. More specifically, it focuses on the work that these authors have done on the subject of silence, focusing on whom and what have conspired to work against authors, specifically female ones. These obstacles include economic standing, gender, and emotional issues. The introduction then branches out to discuss the specific personal obstacles that were faced in the process of writing.

The thesis is written in the manner of a chapbook. It includes four sections that draw their names from the four seasons, and the subject matter varies accordingly. It uses the four seasons as a framework, and builds on them to create a narrative arc throughout the poems. The seasons are all connected to a specific emotional time, which creates a space to discuss both the benefits and disadvantages of speech and silence.

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In 1904, Virginia Woolf wrote about “The Angel in the House”, an “intensely sympathetic...immensely charming...utterly unselfish” presence (Woman and Writing, 59) who “came between herself and her writing” (W and W, 58). Whenever Woolf would begin writing, The Angel would “[slip] behind me and [whisper]: ‘My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of your sex. Never let anyone guess you have a mind of your own’” (W and W, 59).

In 1963, Tillie Olsen discussed the silences of authors as well, particularly woman authors. She focuses first on history. “...the silences where the lives never came to writing. Among these, the mute inglorious Miltons: those whose waking hours are all struggle for existence; the barely educated; the illiterate; women” (Silences, 10). Then she moves closer to home, discussing her own life, describing how “In...twenty years I bore and reared my children, usually had to work on a paid job as well, the simplest circumstances for creation did not exist” (Silences, 19). She discusses the fact that women, as a general rule, have tended to possess less time for writing, first of all because of children. “*There is no one else responsible for these needs*” (Silences, 18, emphasis original). Unless women had servants, there was no one else to do the household chores and watch the children. Secondly, many women needed to work as well, to contribute to the family, something that is still not uncommon today. These certainly fall into the category of what she calls, “unnatural silences” (Silences, 21).

Here, Woolf and Olsen both focus on the outward obstacles that stand between women and writing: men’s control of literature, lack of education, the fact that men have

not traditionally helped with family matters, lack of money. However, both of them are quick to mention inward obstacles as well. I would argue that the outward obstacles have been dissolved for most women, especially the kinds of obstacles that Woolf knew. Today, women authors are just as prominent as male authors, women are being educated at the same rate as men, and while stay-at-home fathers are still uncommon, they are heard of. However, the emotional issues still exist.

Woolf, in an extremely prophetic passage, writes about these emotional issues. She describes a girl, sitting down, waiting to write. “She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl’s fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash” (W and W, 61). This smash that Woolf describes is the woman’s imagination hitting what was expected of her. “The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist’s state of unconsciousness. She could write no more” (W and W, 62). While it could be argued that this emotional problem is brought on by outside issues, it still remains an inward problem. The woman author suddenly remembers who other people expect her to be, and she cannot, at first, ignore that. Woolf writes that it took her a long time to move past expectations and kill her Angel in the Room.

Woolf makes sure to note that although women were starting to make breakthroughs in other fields, this emotional problem would be one to continue. “Indeed”, she continues, “it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against”. And later on the page, she writes, “Even when the path is nominally open – when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant – there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, in her way” (W and W, 62). Although Woolf focused primarily on women when it comes to the emotional stress of having suddenly discovered that what you wish to write may not be something that people would want you to write, Olsen continues the theme, discussing how that extends to authors in general.

Olsen writes about the same issue for all authors, this time in connection to the government. “Censorship silences. Deletions, omissions, abandonment of the medium...The extreme of this: those writers physically silenced by governments” (Silences, 9). However, when she focuses on the emotional aspect of writing, she again discusses it in terms of women, linking back to Woolf. She writes about her own life, after trying to begin writing again: “For a long time I was that emaciated survivor trembling on the beach, unable to rise and walk. Said differently, I could manage only the feeblest, shallowest growth on that devastated soil” (Silences, 21). Even after Olsen was given the means, time, and space to begin writing again, emotionally she was not able to enter and take advantage of it.

Woolf looked forward to a time when women would be able to write without hitting emotional boundaries, but she was realistic about how long that would take.

Olsen, writing 50 years later, confirms her predecessor's predictions. "...we are in a time of more and more hidden and foreground silences, women *and* men...I would like to believe this for what has not yet been written into literature. But it cannot reconcile for what is lost by unnatural silences" (Silences, 21, emphasis original).

As stated before, the outward restrictions on women writing have essentially all but disappeared, at least the sort of restrictions that Woolf faced. She wrote about a time in the future when women could become doctors, lawyers, and civil servants, and we are living in that time today. (What restrictions have continued in our day should be the topic of another essay). However, Olsen's work 50 years later, when women had become doctors, etc., is still concerned about imposed silences, mostly in terms of emotional problems. The conclusion is that while outward restrictions have been destroyed, emotional silences have lived on.

This hypothesis gathers weight when we examine some of the recent work by women writers. In Elizabeth Spires' book entitled, The Wave-Maker, almost all of her poems are written from the perspective of a woman. But the one that has the most to say relating to the topic of emotional silences is her poem, "Story of a Soul". It discusses a woman who chooses to live in "A single smallish room, not even a closet" (The Wave-Maker, 18). This in itself is a kind of silence, sequestering oneself from the opportunities of speech that the world presents, even little ones such as saying hello to a neighbor, and participating in a community. However, this woman's silence becomes even more specific:

The journal's deliberately cryptic.
 Her *real* autobiography, the one going on inside her,
 would be as thick as WAR AND PEACE
 but will never be written—she keeps a tight rein,
 deplores a trend to confess.

(The Wave-Maker, 18).

Spires deliberately and poignantly echoes the fact that one of the aspects of this imposed solitude is a choice of silence of voice as well. This is clearly an example of what both Olsen and Woolf were talking about, especially when we see the reason for this silence later in the Spires' poem. "It was always (no surprise) about LOVE./ Let the word be banished from the English language!/ For now, she prefers her nunnish quietude" (The Wave-Maker, 19).

In Spires' poem, her narrator is silenced by emotional problems, problems that are just like those that Woolf and Olsen discussed. Moreover, they are emotional problems concerning relationships. In this way, the idea of women being silenced by men comes up in an entirely different light. It is not the large idea of 'a man's world' that silences this woman, it is the specific, individual relationship.

This relationship is developed further in the next poem, "Nightgown". A connection to "Story of the Soul" cannot be denied, as those two poems are the only ones in the whole book to mention or focus on the theme of nightgowns. "Nightgown" begins by exploring the terrors of being a nightgown (a distinctly feminine object):

To be inhabited....
 To be folded, without a thought,
 and put in a dark drawer.

Or to hang in a closet, shapeless as a sack,
 knowing the terror of form dissolving into formlessness.
 (The Wave-Maker, 20).

Here, the voice of the nightgown, a distinctly feminine object, follows another poem about silence. The nightgown is worried about not being itself, ignored, and finally, losing any personality that it once had. It fears losing its personality because it lets someone else inside of it, a parallel thought to Woolf's Angel in the Room idea. In the indented section following this, the nightgown appears frantic; "Someone is continually dreaming/ dreams not my own/ so that I am pulled this way and that!" (The Wave-Maker, 20). This fear of not being oneself is emphasized even more by the next section of the poem, where the nightgown considers its dream: "I fly over a streaming patchwork countryside/ to see what has so far eluded me:/ the white world written on with white writing!" (The Wave-Maker, 20). The dream of the nightgown is to be both physically and mentally free. Physically, it wishes to fly, and mentally, it wishes to see the writing that has so far eluded it. This conclusion is a logically sound one to make after the nightgown has feared dreaming other people's dreams. If it is able to read and write, then it has found the solution: it can dream its own dreams, it can have a voice of its own.

In my thesis, I chose to focus on the emotional aspect of silence; firstly because this is where I have seen this tradition moving in the last century. Secondly, it is what most interests me as an author. I write, and enjoy reading, poetry that focuses problems on an individual level because that level is much more changeable. Yet at the same time, by examining just one person's emotional issues, we can also understand others around us with more clarity.

This thesis is about silence on two different levels. On the first level, it is simply the author's background.. For me, my Angel in the Room has always been my family. I know that every author has to, at some point, deal with the expectations that her family has placed on her, and I feel that the expectations put on me specifically do relate to me as a woman. Many of the women in my family have chosen not to have a career, and many of them have chosen not to go to college at all; preferring to stay home as a wives and mothers. As Olsen mentioned, these women have a full time job, and it is a difficult one. However, I felt this expectation placed on me again and again, especially when I chose to move beyond my undergraduate degree, and since then, in my writing, there has been what Woolf called "...foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard" (W and W, 61).

These themes came out especially in the poems "On the Church Steps", a poem that discusses both marriage and being abandoned, the poem "Fog", which presents a snapshot of a family at Christmas, and "With the Windows Open", which contains an abundance of language that has traditionally been applied to women, words like "submit" and "acceptance". Even writing this introduction, knowing that someone I know may read it, is my own version of slaying Woolf's Angel in the Room. I thought I had faced all my writing obstacles within my poems within the thesis; clearly that was not the case. I imagine that, like Woolf, I will find that my Angel in the Room will be difficult to kill. "She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her" (W and W, 60). However, I believe that I can consider this the first step.

Also as an author, the general subject matter of relationships that runs through the poems relates back to my own life. In particular, it relates to a specific relationship in which silence reigned. The impact that relationship had on my life was enough for me to desire to write my thesis around it; I know firsthand the damage that silence can do. However, since then, I have also learned the necessity of communication, and the good that speech can do. The freedom in speech is a theme that Woolf, Olsen, and Spires all rejoice in. Because of that, I started the book with autumn and ended on the positive note of summer. In doing so, the subject of the book became not just the silence in relationships, but also what the reversal of that choice can do.

The second level is the book itself. The poems throughout the book are not meant to all necessarily be about the same people. Instead, they are meant to show different ways that both silence and speech can work in different contexts. However, I did choose to follow a specific narrative arc, following the seasons, in order to both create a coherent grouping and to create a space where the poems could work together side by side as well. By placing specific poems next to each other, I hope to increase what each individual poem is saying into a whole larger message from the book.

My choice to integrate nature and the seasons into what I considered predominantly “relationship poems” followed naturally. I noticed that often when discussing relationships I had used nature metaphors or imagery to describe my situations. When I had consciously identified the theme, it was an easy one with which to work. I found that what I had been doing unconsciously was exactly what I had always

appreciated in other writing: starting from the human, individual level, and then working out into the world, using nature as that bridge.

In the end, all I can do is echo the relief and joy of other women writers when they had finally felt that they had said something about the world, something that at the same time liberated them as women. Woolf writes, rejoicing with the other women authors of her time, “You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men” (W and W, 63). Olsen’s relief at being given a Ford grant, giving her time to write is clearly evident in Silences. Spires’ nightgown, a metaphor for women, sees its ultimate freedom in flying, seeing “the white world written on with white writing!” (The Wave-Maker, 20).

By following in this tradition of women writers, I hope to add this work to the long line before me of female authors, who were aware that they often were not expected or even allowed to speak, but still chose to break the silence. However, it is not the end. Woolf said that best: “The first – killing the Angel in the House – I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet.” (W and W, 62).

Section I:

Autumn

From the Church Steps

With all your small and sparkling corners I've left you
on the stone steps with the church bells behind you.
In the void of the gone-away me
all the tree leaves slanting down
muffle the laughter of the inside waiting crowd
and all their excited talk of you and of me.

And then the silence when they come out to just you
 (quietly sitting under brightly dead leaves
 as the sun turns orange
 when it hits your white dress.)
And their lips will close in admiring astonishment
when they see how different and beautiful you look alone.
 (Your gold hair, brown eyes, and the tear on your face.)
And the dress, the light, the leaves, and the tear,
will show them you sparkle when I'm not here.

6:45, October

The sun's light dropped
on the field like a flower,
but on the petal's withering edges
blackness crept, its life measured
by the sunset's speed.

Address to the Sea Breeze

When you swirled around me strongly,
surely, invitingly,
both of us on the edges of our worlds,
you carried with you souvenirs
of a life I didn't know.
You carefully picked out tastes, smells,
and an ambiance
from across the water,
intending to paint images in my head.
And vividly you did.

The tang of salt, so different
from my hard-packed ground,
and a soft fine mist to gently touch my lips.
And you brought the very faint smell of summer
to my world, my world where the leaves were dying.

You reinforced the parts of me
that hated the hard brown ground
cracking in the sun,
the dryness of the air
cracking the skin on my lips and hands,
the winter that comes every year
cracking branches, and windows.

And if I hadn't sometimes loved the struggling flower
in its crack in the ground,
and if I hadn't known you wouldn't
possess a better sight
then the snow glittering under the moonlight,
I would have found
a boat and followed you,
going wherever you would have liked.
If you'd promised a little more sweetness
in your lightly flowing freedom,
together we could have found

the place where summer started.

By This Lake

the trees live twice,
once in their solid shore life,
and once in the shimmering
rippling reflections in the water.

On the shore, the trees colors
are constant. They stand straight,
only moving in response to the breeze,
as substantial as your life.

In the water, the trees hold
the colors from the shore,
the colors of the sky,
and the colors from the bottom
of the lake that float up
to meet them.

They move when the shore trees move,
when the sky moves,
when the lake moves.

Everything changes when
a falling leaf lands and floats
on the surface of the water,
blocking out a part of the water
trees with its light mass.

Now all you can see is the very real
leaf, solid when the sky moves,
uncaring about the water's depths.

It's hard, hard as the shore-brown
tree trunks, when the substantial,
solid land life destroys
the moveable dream.

Sometimes Learning to Live is Uglier than Death

In the gloomy afternoon
the orange leaves are dancing.
With no sun to warm the windows,
the swirling color is enough.
It brightens the whole grey sky,
all the tree trunks with their dark brown bark,
and the drab, dirty pavement.

The leaves hold all the light
that makes it through the heavy clouds.
Stark against the tree trunks,
and far more graceful
then the harsh angles of the empty branches,
they circle around the sidewalk people
whose pale skin and dull hair
lack the vibrancy of the leaves.
And when they finally land,
they make the dead grass the brightest
spot, both up and down the street.

Plum

Have you ever washed
a gently wrinkled plum,
its dark purple skin
under the water's silver
beard, and then afterwards
noticed the shivering
bead of water
where the stem once grew,
catching the light's reflection,
as if it is peering
out from the wizened center
of the plum itself?

The Girl Who Says Nothing a Lot

When the fly on my arm stops tickling
then I'll hear your words.

Right now they're only whining-
buzzing down the inside, landing on the outside
all the knowing water pipes
dimly caught behind dirty glass
and bouncing off blank familiar walls.

All your words foretelling our futures and our dreams, they--
You'd think there'd be a fly swatter!
Or at least a rolled up copy
of the business section that we might have
left behind
last year.

"We could have a green house in the suburbs" you say,
(I'm listening really!)
while I wave my arms and I
almost
catch the fly in mid-air.

But instead
I only brush the windowsill, sending up a cloud of dust.
The fluttering particles distract me
for a moment,
but not back to your (never-ending) words.

Below us
(or is it now just me?)
is a donut store and its owner, Jersey,
whose waist is as soft and doughy as his wares (he's always liked his product way too
much.)

Remember that?

You, done talking about our future lives, are now
optimistic, hoping I've seen.

"I think that Jersey and that girl below us are breaking up", I say,
leaning over to watch Jersey talking
and a tearful tall dark girl.

Despite your expectation of my accepting words, you stand up
and look down with me.

(Is it both of us?)

In her tears the tall dark girl almost steps in front of a taxi,
past Jersey's outstretched arms.

Your hand is on the windowsill
where I brushed the dust and missed the fly.

(It's the closest we've been in eight days, two hours.

Not since I accidentally ran into you,
moving boxes out.)

The fly lands again,
and we're back here
with a cement floor and a dirty window
surrounding you and me.

Forget Me Slowly

as the Trees forget the summer,
their green leaves still
alive after the first cold wind has blown.
Year after tedious, progressive
year, they hope this first wind won't again
be followed by the first light, delicate
snowfall. The sun shines less,
and the leaves strain, helpless without light.
And time passes blusteringly.
The time arrives; the last leaves finally fall.
But winter will tire at last, and they wait,
more leaves enclosed inside,
a tribute to the summer.

Section II:

Winter

The Ponderous Secret of Distance

As I look out from one of the tallest apartments in the city,
I find it hard to believe that the air is even substantial.

I notice most your apartment's lights, twenty floors below me and two blocks away,
and your neighbor's lights, that surround you on all four sides,
and the streetlights lining your whole street,
and the car lights, waiting in their rows.
These lights all look the same to me. As for you, I'm sure they blind you.
I close my eyes to see yours narrow as you drive,
as car light after car light illuminates your face, white against the night.
All except your eyes, which darken like the outside street to compensate.
But you find the street lights towering and comforting,
and your neighbor's lights assure you that in the void of night, you are not alone.

To me, up here, all the lights are small and white,
a bed of surprised stars that landed harshly,
and now they stare unblinking at their former resting place,
together dreaming they'll fly upwards once again.

When the sun rises, I watch the ocean's edge, knowing that you'll be there,
watching the waves that look to me like tiny ripples,
but knowing that for you they could be enough to overwhelm you.
And I'm glad that you don't see the ocean that I see,
the vast, eternal ocean.
Instead, all you see is the start of something beautiful and terrible.

And you, sitting in your closed-off kitchen,
blinded by the car lights every night,
nearly swallowed daily by the ocean's arms,
you somehow learned the weighty, ponderous secret of distance
far more completely than I ever did.

The Dark

sneaks in, black
hooded, standing in
the corner where the streetlight
doesn't touch knowing which
floorboards to skip barely
brushing the counter's corner just
hitting the chain from the fan
 (don't be ridiculous, that clinking
 came from outside)
then finally, above the blankets,
just about to touch her hair.

You Know I Want to be the Wind

swirling around the lamppost on
your street, twisting your neighbor's
scarf through my stern fingers. I want you
to see the trees that line the road bend down
for me to hurry past your building's
corner, and whistle through the gutter.
I would blow the cold packed snow straight
off your roof and then approach your window,
and shake and rattle its locked panes.

Fog

Instead of snow that winter, there was fog, slinking down the rolling hills.
And as the day went on, its grey clammy tendrils crept up to our house.
We opened presents in our living room beside the big window.
It was Christmas. We couldn't see a thing.

The grey tendrils of fog began to close in on our house,
and our dissatisfaction and disapproval grew inside as the fog approached.
It was Christmas, but all we saw was fog stretching.
out, getting slowly denser as the day went on.

Still the resentful disquiet grew.
We opened presents beside the big window, and instead of looking at each other
we looked out on the fog, and watched it slowly deepen.
Instead of snow that winter, there was fog, slinking down the rolling hills.

With the Windows Open

The wind swirls through
my window's tiny crack,
and the beautifully cold air
revives my inside,
overused air.

I left it open to participate
in the way the world has changed tonight,
the way it prepares itself for the cold
silver beauty of winter.

My inside air is changing now.
It runs before the swirling wind,
forced in harsh, unknown directions,
suddenly up the farthest corners of my snow
white living room.

It huddles in those corners, shivering
before the violence and superiority
of this new, invited guest.

Outside, the trees receive this cold
wind diffidently. The wind lingers
on their brown, hard trunks,
filling all their uneven grooves.

And in their shock,
they drop their leaves, convinced
the sacrifice will save them.
And it does.

Later, when the snowflakes
gather by the millions
on their leafless branches,
they simply bow beneath their weight.

By embracing winter,

they keep themselves alive.

While we react the other way,
with scarves and boots and gloves,
our cheeks burning with the cold.

And our warmth
melts the snowflakes sadly.

But my admiration of the trees,
and their way of fighting
by submitting coaxes me to keep
the window open.

Enough for the wind
to sometimes fill my nostrils,
enough for an occasional
mouthful of winter.

Leaving them open
is the closest to the trees'
acceptance I can come.

With the windows open,
maybe I can find
a little of their willingness
to set the unnecessary free.

I See You Through

a tree's branches, down a steep staircase,
I turn a corner and sense you've just
been there. If anyone smiles in
excited greeting, I stop, look
around, expecting you there.

"Guess who stopped by?" someone asks
with a smile. I think of you,
but they don't know who you are.

Somehow, somehow, you've disillusioned
me from the truth, because when someone stands
up to close the blinds in a room, only I
see you just before the they close.

Section III:

Spring

The Books We Can't See

So what do you think?
If we turn on that lamp will it burn?
(They say, 'Well, it has a new light bulb
and it's already plugged in')
I think that I have a better idea-
we can tiptoe around it in the dark till we know.
We'll place it in the corner beside all the books we don't read
then we'll come back tomorrow
to see the cat batting the chain.

'Don't touch that please'
we tell the guests in the house-
we haven't yet stopped scolding the cat.

It's That Specific, Careful Time of Night

when the halfway moon is bright,
brighter than the setting sun's sky.

The wind rushing through the car window
rushes through my hair
in the dim light of the insistent day.

The clouds are darker purple
then the sky they rest on, still some blue
left over from the day.

As the clouds lay expressionless in the sky,
I wonder if the wind is ripping
through their lightly spun masses
as through my hair right now.
Does the wind run teasing through their midst as well?
Do they move joyfully, bouncing with the movement?

For You, My Baby

From the tall, arched windows in the high, white room
the immense blue sky enters.
The light transforms the white walls whiter,
and it persuades the brown floor to turn a burnished bronze.

And I think of you, my little one,
you who contained all the colors of the room.
Your expansive blue eyes, your skin so white it shone,
and your hair like the floor, golden brown,
warming with the sunshine.

I carefully distribute my furniture (mostly white),
and hang no paintings on the skin of the wall,
nothing to mar its smoothness and bright color.

And these rising, triumphant windows,
a clear blue view to another higher world
will endure no curtains. They will exist
like you, my dear, always looking to the sky,
never concerned with the down below.

And under the bright but gentle gaze of the windows,
the wooden boards shine softly,
the warmth from them so soft I can feel it.

My high-windowed room for you, my baby,
its gaze forever upward and exultant.

The Flight of Birds

The bells go on and on, the ringing slow,
starting by seeping through the double doors
then quickly springing past the bright windows
and bursting on the street, they're calling more
and more birds from the winter trees, warmly
pledging the friendship of clear music's flight.
And so they come, flying, swooping, freely
forming a changing circle in the light.
And with the tolling bells the birds rise high,
the actors in this musical, who stay
until the music stops, and then they dive
down to the rows on their dead branches, grey
against the lighter sky. They'll wait, and when
bells start again, be actors once again.

The Effect of Water

The night's about to storm, he said.

Can't you smell it?	The worms are coming out for air.
Can't you feel it?	The cloud settles among us gently.
Rain slivers through the lamplight.	Then it starts to run,
down all the rooftops and	it passes through the dark
people's hair,	and travels slowly
to the soles of their shoes	carrying small rivers
to the gutters	from the sidewalks,
as they hurry	leaving moving water
their wet clothes darker	under the light
and the drops slanting down the windshields of cars.	

I Look For You Among the Sunsets

Wherever I may be
when half the sky's as dark as night,
and the other half is brighter than the daylight,
I walk outside to look and wait for you.

If I'm in the plains
I wait to see your hair
blowing with the tall gold grass,
their colors different mingling shades
of brown and tan and gold.

If I'm on the coast
I expect to meet your eyes,
remembering their snapping
that resembled the quick flash
and steady endurance
of a wave against a rock.

And if I'm on a mountain,
I know again the clarity of sight
we had for just a little while,
and I remember the difficulty
of breathing that we knew together.

From a swinging bridge,
I watch the sun
set into a river,
waiting for your hand
to steady both of us.

But wherever you decide to find me,
I know the sunset
will blush your cheeks
and its fading light
will fire your brown eyes.

So if you're anywhere

around the world
keep walking
at the end of the day.

Section IV: Summer

With no beginnings we begin today,

under this great blue sky of ours
not a cloud in sight, the brightness aching in my eyes.
Come, and sit down next to me,
before your shadow falls on me,
before you obstruct the achingly large sky from my eyes.
And under this vast blue sky of ours,
entire worlds contained above, we'll begin today.

How the World Turns Quietly

On three sides windows
surround me, the quiet road outside
behind me. I look first through the windows
next to me, the sunlight hotly
longing for the shadows on my other side.
My left arm warms as the windows warm,
my left eye dazzled,
my right eye disillusioned in its shadow.

I look up at the windows before me
and the harder I stare,
I only see me staring
back at myself,
my face suspended
among the backyard woods.
So suddenly unexpected,
that until I realize the image is another me,
I believe I've become a visionary,
a perceiver of the otherworldly.

But instead of a vision, it's just a reproduction,
me staring gravely back at me,
the face as three dimensional
as the leaves surrounding it,
a bar of sunlight brightening both.

How the world turns quietly,
and how much of it reflects in windows!

The reflection as still
as its origin, forgetting the world's movement.
No forests fall,
no pond's disturbed.
Instead, the turning world centers here,
on slowly heating sunlight,
on a still face suspended in forests,
framed by tree trunks.

A quiet world it seems, after all
and a still one.
Just the blink of my eyes in the glass
and a leaf spinning down behind my face.

How the world turns quietly,
and how much of it reflects in windows!

And suddenly, staring at my other quiet face,
I feel a rebellion against its calm, wishing
that it would turn around, look further back,
without me, for some monumental moment
the spinning world has advertised.

Something more than a quick blink of leaves.
A squirrel, gathering
nuts to fulfill future feasts,
a flower, shaking like a shiver,
the tortured hurry of a running brook
as winter slowly tiptoes to its banks.

And you, my face, reflected in the window,
settle for simply staring
when there's so much frantic movement
right behind you.

How the world turns quietly,
and how much of it is just beyond the windows!

The Water That Stands Still

As the waves curl covetously around the sand
then finally release it in another place,
you stake your claim with towels
on the edge of something you don't understand.
Remember: the first thirty feet of water can be yours
(beach balls and cautious swimming practice).
But further out, at forty feet, everything's unplanned.
Careful, don't lose focus, or you'll think
it's the water that stands still,
while you move in and out,
in and out
in and out,
and you'll forget, for a second
that you belong on land.

Summer

I.

And the steady
golden pulse of the sun
fights to push the edges
of every shadow
on her body. Underneath
her ear lobe, beside
the hair on her neck, between
all of her toes. And where
the shadows already exist,
they always win the battle.
So she focuses on the sunlit parts.
Her left cheek starting to blush,
the sunlight spreading across
and warming her whole stomach.
If she concentrates intently
she can feel her hair
lightening under the sun's touch.

II.

As for you,
the sun wars on you
as well; predominantly
in your eyes, as they change
from simply shadowed
to a battlefield. Your dark eyes fight
like a deep forest fights the sunlight,
when, at first, the shafts
of light hit only the top
surface of the leaves.
Until the light becomes too strong,
and the forest compromises
to let a few gold beams
slide onto the forest floor.
So on you, the light sometimes

conquers shadows.

City Sunset

The windows are yellow
islands shining out from brick
walls. They rival the brightness
of the sun in the sky;
but that luster will falter
when the sun falls.

And in that second
the world flips around-
the buildings drift,
while the clouds stand still-
and the cars are all quiet
as the road runs beneath them.

But in the next moment,
when the shining yellow islands
of the windows disappear,
the bricks will fail to reflect
the sun. And then the clouds and the cars
will start running again.

All Different Colors

When silence is broken, it's like spray paint
exploding
inside a crowded hardware store
coloring a squeaky old shopping cart
and an old woman's clothespins
and a black-haired man's work gloves
and a little girl and her doll who are dressed just the same
 both in skirts and sparkly bracelets and headbands
and the cart drips yellow
and the old woman's hair has turned orange
and the man's work gloves are green
and the doll's face is bright blue
 (she's not cold, she has a coat, but she's vividly painted)
and the floor and the people
are all different colors
and we're saving the mop-up for
an entirely new day.
And on the inside and outside of that one hardware store
up all the long aisles
and down all the register lines
and on all of the people who have walked out the door
there aren't any more blank canvases.

Of Purple Imprints

In the moment of the almost kiss you kissed me.
And the overwhelming sky shone through your eyes,
they were that blue. And harshly
the sun made the edges of your face shine,
until my vision was burned by your shape.
And on the pavement, your shadow engulfed mine.

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